

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

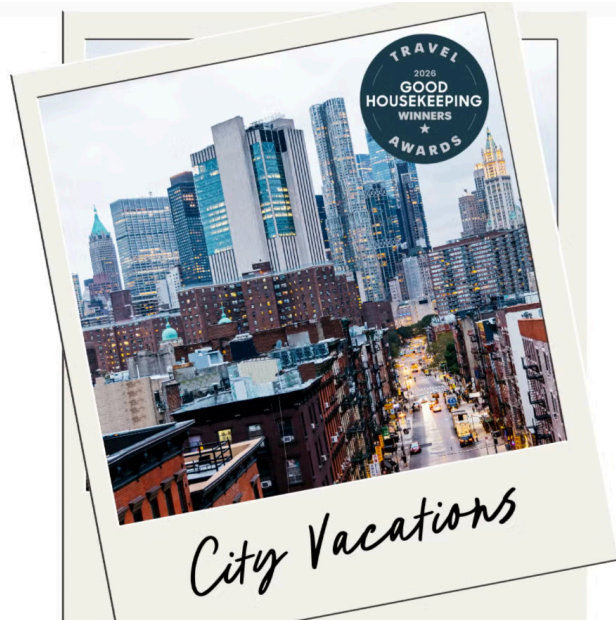
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23 Unexpected City Vacations to Add to Your Travel Bucket List

In your urban era? Same! A cave spa, baseball stadium with a lazy river, and book-filled treasure chest are surprising finds within the city winners from Good Housekeeping's 2026 Travel Awards.

BY KAREN CICERO PUBLISHED: NOV 18, 2025

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Exploring new cities should be exciting for your entire crew. As part of the [Good Housekeeping 2026 Travel Awards](#), our testers logged miles to uncover destinations with big-ticket thrills, budget-friendly bites and space to breathe back at the hotel. Along the way, we found surprising activities you might not expect — and definitely won't want to miss.

City Hotels

FUN-FILLED FAMILY PLAYGROUND



Gaylord Hotels, multiple locations

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This hotel chain, known for its lush atriums, is also a kids' programming whiz! With offerings from a summer collab with DC Superheroes to a winter wonderland with ice slides, **Gaylord Hotels** have mastered the art of helping families make memories. Five of the six locations boast fun-filled water parks with wave pools and lazy rivers.

TESTER NOTES: Testers visited three locations, including the newest spot in Chula Vista, California, just outside San Diego. All three were impressed with the water safety. "We appreciated the kid-size life vests to borrow and were impressed by the lifeguards' vigilance," said one mom of Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center near Denver. Another tester, who stayed at Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center near Orlando, said, "My kids must have gone around the water park's lazy river 100 times!"

CHARMING CENTRAL PARK STAY



Park Lane New York, New York City

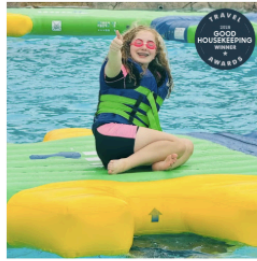
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CREDIT: PARKLANENEWYORK

Forty percent of the rooms at the **Park Lane New York**—along with its iconic rooftop breakfast spot and bar—face Central Park, which is right across the street from the hotel. The 47-floor property distinguishes itself from several pricier neighbors thanks to a fairly recent redesign that brought whimsical touches inspired by the location to room interiors and common spaces. For guests traveling with grown children or members of their extended family, the hotel offers connecting rooms that sleep six to eight and are easily bookable on its website.

TESTER NOTES: "I've stayed in a few dozen hotels in New York City, and Park Lane is my favorite so far," said our tester, who traveled with her daughter. "Besides a convenient location, fantastic food, and a comfy bed, we were gobsmacked by the art. Every guest room has an exquisite hand-painted mural."

SPLASHY WATER PARK RESORT



Okana Resort & Indoor Waterpark, Oklahoma City

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The new **Okana** resort can turn anyone into a water park person. The soaking rides and slides in the 100,000-square-foot indoor facility aren't much different from those at other parks of this nature, but the atmosphere here is leveled up. Modern decor, high-quality food and an excellent spa make the experience feel like an actual vacation rather than a trip you tolerate for your kids' sake. The whole family will also be drawn to the seasonally operated outdoor adventure lagoon, which has fun features like Zip & Dip, a zipline that drops you into the water!

TESTER NOTES: "Okana is nothing less than an oasis in the heartland of Oklahoma!" said our tester, who traveled there with her spouse and two children. "Every single hospitality detail has been considered. The rooms are spacious and well equipped. The dining amenities are plentiful and delicious—this isn't your typical water park food!"

A GRAND SLAM STAY



The Rally Hotel, Denver

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Next to the Colorado Rockies' baseball stadium, The **Rally Hotel** attracts sports-loving families with its rooftop pool, where you can catch the game while taking a dip. (Pro tip: Cover up on chilly days—this is Colorado, after all—with the hotel's plaid plush robes.) For kids who are more into space than sports, book the immersive package and have a spaceship tent and a star projector delivered to your room. Large families and those traveling with grandparents will appreciate that the 182-key property offers several two-bedroom suites.

TESTER NOTES: "My 4-year-old slept in the tent because she loved it so much," said our tester, whose was traveling with five guests, including her father. "The baseball memorabilia in the lobby and a fun but manageably sized pool also make the hotel grandparent-friendly."

UPSCALE FOR ALL AGES



The St. Regis Chicago

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Kids and teens never feel left out at the **St. Regis Chicago**, a newish luxury hotel with incredible views of the Chicago River and Navy Pier. While parents check in, tiny tourists are directed to a mammoth treasure chest in the lobby that opens to reveal (gaspl!) jars of treats as well as books and toys they can borrow during their stay. At a complimentary evening reception where a champagne bottle is sawed open with a sword (it's a brand tradition!), kids line up with sparkling juice from a cart that has glasses at the ready. Perhaps the most family-oriented advantage of all: The hotel's noodle-filled pool opens at 6 a.m., so your mini early risers won't have to wait to take a dip.

TESTER NOTES: "The most delicious food we had on our trip was at the hotel," said our tester, who visited with her college-age daughter. "The three-course Italian snack experience (*shown*) with homemade pasta that you can watch chefs making in a viewing window blew us away."

OASIS IN THE DESERT



The Wigwam Arizona, Litchfield Park, Arizona

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CREDIT: WIGWAMARIZONA

Freshly glow up after a multimillion-dollar renovation, **The Wigwam Arizona**, an almost 100-year-old resort near Phoenix, appeals to travelers who crave a stay that combines cultural touches with pampering and great food. Spacious adobe and timber suites (a.k.a. casitas) dot the grounds, which are lush with cacti, floral gardens, and palm trees. A serene adult-only pool tucked away from the two others provides a refreshing break from the heat.

TESTER NOTES: "My wife and I really loved Litchfields, a restaurant with a modern Western vibe," said our tester. "Watching the chefs in the open-fire kitchen proved very entertaining, and our tomahawk steak and the service were excellent." They also felt that the lobby exemplified the thoughtfulness that had gone into the property's refresh. "It has retained many of the timeless original details while adding modern flair."

LUCKY BREAK



Foxwoods Resort Casino, Mashantucket, Connecticut

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A 33-foot-high zipline that launches into the the grounds of a museum isn't exactly what you anticipate from a the largest casino resort in the Northeast, but **Foxwoods**, about a three-hour drive from New York City, delivers all kinds of thrills and chills: live entertainment with well-known guests (Jerry Seinfeld is a regular), celebrity-chef restaurants, and even a blissful spa. Guests can choose to stay in one of three on-site hotels or in a private villa. A pickleball facility, an escape room, and a pottery studio redefine the casino experience.

TESTER NOTES: "It would be hard to visit here without feeling satisfied on some level," said one of our testers who stayed at the Grand Pequot Tower, a large and welcoming space that celebrates the rich history of the Mashantucket tribe. "The variety was what made our trip so enjoyable. While there are multiple casinos on the property, you don't have to spend a dollar on gambling to enjoy yourself."



The Weldon Hotel, Portland, Maine

\$1 AT
THEWELDONHOTEL.COM

CREDIT: THEWELDONHOTEL

When you're traveling with kids, nothing is more precious in a place to stay than space—and the **Weldon Hotel** offers beautifully decorated one- and two-bedroom suites that have all the conveniences of home and more. Located in Portland's Old Port District, the new property has 13 apartment-style suites that boast full kitchens, in-room laundry, and local coffee to brew. It also has common hotel conveniences like a fitness center.

TESTER NOTES: "Being at the Weldon Hotel felt like staying in an upscale, beautifully decorated, and perfectly stocked fancy apartment," said our tester, who visited with her family. "We also appreciated the technology in the room: a big TV with a Roku streaming setup, a Sonos Sound Bar speaker you could pair to if you wanted to listen to music. and even a turntable with vinyl records my 7-year-old wanted to play over and over again."

TURKISH DELIGHT



Argos in Cappadocia, Turkey

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Core memories will be undoubtedly be made at this dreamy hotel in the central region of Turkey that is famous for its castle, hot air balloons, and rock formations known as fairy chimneys. No two rooms are alike at **Argos in Cappadocia**; each of the 71 places to stay, some with fireplaces and plunge pools, was hand-carved from ancient homes and volcanic rock. The spa, a newer addition, is built into a cave and includes a pool.

TESTER NOTES: "I have been to my fair share of spas, and this spa will go down as one of my favorite and most memorable," said our tester, a GH beauty expert. "I highly recommend the Turkish hammam. They create a unique spin with the way the soap is applied. I felt like I was in a cloud."

SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY



Emeline, Charleston, South Carolina

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Historic Charleston caters to modern sensibilities at **Emeline**, a boutique spot that locals swear has one of the best restaurants in the city. Frannie & The Fox, a wood-fired eatery with a thoughtful seasonal menu, dishes out delights such as Baked Casarecce (hearty pasta) and a salad with sweet potato vinaigrette. Don't miss The Den, a speakeasy tucked away in the back of the restaurant that serves up a variety of cocktails and mocktails. The property is also walkable to many restaurants, shops, and attractions.

TESTER NOTES: "The speakeasy's space was pretty and decked out with floral decor," said our tester. "It was a cute and cozy spot perfect for grabbing a drink with friends." She also noted that her room had a "vintage-meets-modern aesthetic" and said, "The bed was incredibly comfy, so I woke up feeling well-rested every morning."

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